

National Fast Day

by Charles Finney

Charles Finney's sermon emphasizes the significance of fasting as a means of repentance and the divine role of human governments in society.

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1, Romans 13:1

Topics: "National Repentance", "The Role of Government"

Description

Charles Finney emphasizes the significance of national fasting as a means of public repentance and acknowledgment of national sins. He outlines the essential elements of an acceptable fast, including genuine sorrow, confession, and a commitment to reform. Finney argues that human governments are divinely instituted and that citizens, especially Christians, have a duty to engage in national fasts to seek God's mercy and avert judgment. He highlights various national sins, such as the treatment of Native Americans and the institution of slavery, that necessitate collective humility and prayer. The sermon calls for a sincere commitment to reform alongside fasting, warning against the hypocrisy of seeking God's favor without genuine change.

Transcript

Text--Isaiah 58: "Cry aloud, spare not; lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins," &c. &c.

My design is not to enter into a critical exposition of this chapter, but merely to make it the basis of some remarks upon private and public FASTING. In doing this I shall show:

I. WHAT IS IMPLIED IN AN ACCEPTABLE FAST.

II. THE IMPORTANCE OF ABSTINENCE FROM FOOD ON SUCH OCCASIONS.

III. THAT HUMAN GOVERNMENTS ARE A DIVINE INSTITUTION.

IV. THE PRINCIPLE UPON WHICH GOD DEALS WITH NATIONS AS SUCH.

V. NOTICE THE DESIGN, PROPRIETY, AND USE OF NATIONAL FASTS.

VI. POINT OUT THE DUTY OF CITIZENS, AND ESPECIALLY OF CHRISTIANS AS CITIZENS, IN RESPECT TO THEM.

VII. NOTICE SOME OF THE NATIONAL SINS WHICH CALL THIS NATION TO FASTING, HUMILIATION AND PRAYER.

I. What is implied in an acceptable fast.

1. It implies repentance. Fasting without repentance must be an abomination.
2. It implies such a degree of sorrow and concern as to destroy, for the time being, the appetite for food. Every one is familiar with the fact, that when the mind is strongly exercised, and a high degree of emotion exists, it, for the time being, destroys the appetite. Children, arising in the morning to go a journey, are too much excited to eat. So when persons lose their friends, or any thing else occurs that produces a strong excitement of mind, they naturally reject their food. This fact is easily accounted for on physiological principles. When the mind is strongly exercised, there is a strong determination of blood to the head. When the appetite for food is excited, there is a determination of blood to the stomach. When, therefore, the mind is strongly exercised, there is a want of appetite for food of course; because, in ordinary circumstances, there is not that determination of blood to the stomach which produces a craving for food. Therefore,
3. Acceptable fasting implies abstinence from food, for the time being.
4. It implies confession of sin to God, and to those who have been injured.
5. It implies restitution, so far as restitution is in your power.
6. It implies reformation.

II. Abstinence from food important.

1. If the requisite state of mind exists, the health demands abstinence from food. When the brain is strongly exercised by the mind, if food be taken into the stomach, it will not, ordinarily, be digested; for the reason, that there is so much blood flowing to the brain as to deprive the stomach of that amount of excitement, and determination of blood to that organ, that is demanded for the purposes of digestion. In such cases food should not be taken, as it will seriously impair the health.
2. In such cases, food cannot be taken without serious detriment to the state of mind required. If the blood be diverted from the head to the stomach the strong exercise of the mind must necessarily, in a great measure, cease; but if the blood be not diverted from the head sufficient for digestion, the fermentation of food in the stomach, although it may not actually annihilate those exercises of the mind, must necessarily greatly impede them.
3. In such cases, abstinence greatly favors the healthy action of the mind, and leaves it free to pursue its investigations, and to exercise its affections, without being under the necessity of competing with the stomach, in its efforts to retain a sufficiency of blood for the brain. Who does not know, that when he has taken a full meal, he is disqualified, for a time, for close and vigorous thought? This is a physiological result. The stomach must have the excitement of a considerable determination of blood to that organ, or the process of digestion cannot go forward. And if, soon after eating a full meal, your mind be, by any means, lashed into a state of powerful excitement, you are nearly or quite sick in consequence.

4. Judicious fasting greatly aids the mind in gaining an ascendance over the bodily appetites and passions. This, also, is a physiological fact, easily explained. But into this I cannot here enter.

III. Human governments are a divine institution.

I remark upon the divine authority of governments in this place, because of the manifest propriety of recognizing them, upon a celebration of a National Fast. You will indulge me in speaking more at length upon this head, as their divine authority has of late been questioned. And I will quote from my recently published *Skeletons on Theology*:

FIRST. Human governments are a necessity of human nature.

1. There is a material universe.
2. The bodies of men are material.
3. All action wastes these material bodies, and consequently they need continual sustenance.
4. Hence, we have many bodily wants.
5. Hence, the necessity of worldly goods and possessions.
6. There must be real estate.
7. It must belong to somebody.
8. There must, therefore, be all the forms of conveyancing, registry, and in short, all the forms of legal government. to settle and manage the real estate affairs of men.
9. Men have minds residing in a material body, and depending upon the organization and perfection of this body for mental development.
10. The mind receives its ideas of external objects, and the elements of all its knowledge through the bodily senses. It therefore needs books and other means of knowledge.
11. Hence, for this reason also men need property.
12. Moral beings will not agree in opinions on any subject, without similar degrees of knowledge.
13. Hence, no human community exists, or ever will exist, who on all subjects will agree in opinion.
14. This creates a necessity for human legislation and adjudication, to apply the great principle of moral law to all human affairs.
15. There are multitudes of human wants and necessities that cannot properly be met, except thro' the instrumentality of human governments.

SECOND. This necessity will continue as long as human beings exist in this world.

1. This is as certain as that the human body will always need sustenance, clothing, &c.

2. It is as certain as that the human soul will always need instruction, and that the means of instruction will not grow spontaneously, without expense or labor.

3. It is as certain as that men of all ages and circumstances will never possess equal degrees of information on all subjects.

4. If all men were perfectly holy and disposed to do right, the necessity of human governments would not be set aside, because this necessity is founded in the ignorance of mankind.

5. The decisions of legislators and judges must be authoritative, so as to settle questions of disagreement in opinion, bind, and protect all parties.

6. The Bible represents human governments not only as existing, but as giving their authority and power to the support of the Church in its most prosperous state, or in the Millennium. It proves that human government will not be dispensed with when the world is holy:

Isa. 49:22, 23: 'Thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I will lift up my hand to the Gentiles, and set up my standard to the people: and they shall bring thy sons in their arms, and thy daughters shall be carried upon their shoulders. And kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers: they shall bow down to thee with their faces toward the earth, and lick up the dust of thy feet; and thou shalt know that I am the Lord: for they shall not be ashamed that wait for me.'

THIRD. Human governments are plainly recognized in the Bible as a part of the moral government of God.

1. Dan. 2:21; 'He changes the times and the seasons; He removeth kings and setteth up kings; He giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding.'

Dan. 4:17, 25: 'This matter is by the decree of the watchers, and the demand by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will, and setteth up over it the basest of men.' 'They shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field, and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and they shall wet thee with the dew of heaven, and seven times shall pass over thee, till thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.' Dan. 5: 21, Shows that this was done.

Rom. 13:1-7: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing. Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.'

Titus 3:1: 'Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work.'

I Peter 2:13, 14: 'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme, or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by Him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well.'

These passages prove conclusively, that God establishes human governments, as a part of his moral government.

2. It is a matter of fact, that God does exert moral influences through the instrumentality of human governments.

3. It is a matter of fact, that He often executes his law, punishes vice, and rewards virtue, through the instrumentality of human governments.

4. Under the Jewish Theocracy, where God was King, it was found indispensable to have the forms of the executive department of government.

FOURTH. Whose right and duty it is to govern.

1. I have said that government is a necessity. Human beings are, under God, dependent on human government to promote their highest well-being.

2. It is his right and duty to govern, who is both able and willing, in the highest and most effectual manner, to secure and promote individual and public virtue and happiness.

3. Upon him all eyes are or ought to be turned, as one whose right and whose duty it is, to sustain to them the relation of ruler.

FIFTH. In what cases human legislation imposes moral obligation.

1. Not when it requires what is inconsistent with moral law.

2. Not when it is arbitrary, or not founded in right reason. But--

3. It always imposes moral obligation when it is in accordance with moral law, or the law of nature.

SIXTH. It is the duty of all men to aid in the establishment and support of human governments.

1. Because human governments are founded in the necessities of human beings.

2. As all men are in some way dependent upon them, it is the duty of every man to aid in their establishment and support.

3. As the great law of benevolence, or universal good-willing, demands the existence of human governments, all men are under a perpetual and unalterable moral obligation to aid in their establishment and support.

4. In popular or elective governments, every man having a right to vote, and every human being who has moral influence, is bound to exert that influence in the promotion of virtue and happiness. And as human governments are plainly indispensable to the highest good of man, he is bound to exert his influence to secure a legislation that is in accordance with the law of God.

5. The obligation of human beings to support and obey human governments, while they legislate upon the principles of the moral law, is as undeniable as the moral law itself.

SEVENTH. It is a ridiculous and absurd dream, to suppose that human governments can ever be dispensed with in the present world.

1. Because such a supposition is entirely inconsistent with the nature of human beings.

2. It is equally inconsistent with their relations and circumstances.

3. Because it assumes, that the necessity of government is founded alone in human depravity; whereas the foundation of this necessity is human ignorance, and human depravity is only an additional reason for the existence of human governments. The primary idea of law is to teach; hence, law has a precept. It is authoritative, and therefore has a penalty.

4. Because it assumes, that men would always agree in judgment, if their hearts were right, irrespective of their degrees of information.

5. Because it sets aside one of the plainest and most unequivocal doctrines of revelation.

Objection. The Kingdom of God is represented in the Bible as subverting all other kingdoms.

Answer. This is true, and all that can be meant by this is, that the time will come when God shall be regarded as the supreme and universal sovereign of the universe; when his law shall be regarded as universally obligatory; when all kings, legislators, and judges shall act as his servants, declaring, applying, and administering the great principle of his law to all the affairs of human beings. Thus God will be the Supreme Sovereign, and earthly rulers will be presidents, governors, kings, and judges, under Him, and acting by his authority, as revealed in the Bible.

Obj. It is objected, that God only providentially establishes human governments, and that He does not approve of their selfish and wicked administration; that He only uses them providentially, as He does Satan, for the promotion of his own designs.

Ans. 1. God no where commands mankind to obey Satan; but He does command them to obey magistrates and rulers.

Rom. 13:1: 'Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.'

1 Pet. 2:13, 14: 'Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.'

2. He no where recognizes Satan as his servant, sent and set by Him to administer justice and execute wrath upon the wicked; but He does this in respect to human governments.

Rom. 13:2-6: 'Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God; and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same. For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid: for he beareth not the

sword in vain: for he is the MINISTER OF GOD, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake. For, for this cause pay ye tribute also; for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.'

3. It is true indeed, that God approves of nothing that is ungodly and selfish in human governments. Neither did He approve of what was ungodly and selfish in the Scribes and Pharisees; and yet Christ said to his disciples, 'The Scribes and Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. Therefore whatsoever things they command you, that observe and do; but go ye not after their works, for they say, and do not.' Here the plain common sense principle is recognized, that we are to obey when the requirement is not inconsistent with the moral law, whatever may be the character or the motive of the ruler. We are always to obey heartily as unto the Lord, and not unto men, and render obedience to magistrates for the honor and glory of God, and as doing service to Him.

Obj. It is objected, that Christians should leave human governments to the management of the ungodly, and not be diverted from the work of saving souls, to intermeddle with human governments.

Ans. 1. This is not being diverted from the work of saving souls. The promotion of public and private order and happiness is one of the indispensable means of saving souls.

2. It is nonsense to admit, that Christians are under an obligation to obey human government, and still have nothing to do with the choice of those who shall govern.

Obj. It is objected, that we are commanded not to avenge ourselves, that 'Vengeance is mine, and I will repay, saith the Lord.' It is said, that if I may not avenge or redress my own wrongs in my own person, I may not do it through the instrumentality of human government.

Ans. 1. It does not follow, that because you may not take it upon you to redress your own wrongs by a summary and personal infliction of punishment upon the transgressor, that human governments may not punish them.

2. Because all private wrongs are a public injury; and irrespective of any particular regard to your personal interest, magistrates are bound to punish crime for the public good.

3. It does not follow, because that while God has expressly forbidden you to redress your own wrongs by administering personal and private chastisement, He has expressly recognized the right and made it the duty of the public magistrate to punish crimes.

Obj. It is objected, that love is so much better than law as that where love reigns in the heart, law can be universally dispensed with.

Ans. 1. This supposes, that if there is only love there need be no rule of duty.

2. This objection overlooks the fact, that law is, in all worlds, the rule of duty, and that legal sanctions make up an indispensable part of that circle of motives that are suited to the nature, relations, and government of moral beings.

3. The law requires love; and nothing is law, either human or divine, that is inconsistent with universal benevolence. And to suppose that love is better than law, is to suppose that obedience to law sets aside the necessity of law.

Obj. It is objected, that Christians have something else to do besides meddle with politics.

Ans. 1. In a popular government politics are an indispensable part of religion. No man can possibly be benevolent or religious, without concerning himself, to a greater or less extent, with the affairs of human government.

2. It is true, that Christians have something else to do than to go with a party to do evil, or to peddle with politics in a selfish or ungodly manner. But they are bound to meddle with politics in popular governments, for the same reason that they are bound to seek the universal good of all men.

Obj. It is said, that human governments are no where expressly authorized in the Bible.

Ans. 1. This is a mistake. Both their existence and lawfulness are as expressly recognized in the above quoted scriptures as they can be.

2. If God did not expressly authorize them, it would still be both the right and the duty of mankind to institute human governments; because they are plainly demanded by the necessities of human nature. It is a first truth, that whatever is essential to the highest good of moral beings in any world, they have a right and are bound to do. So far, therefore, are men from needing any express authority to establish human governments, that no possible prohibition could render their establishment unlawful. It has been shown, in my lectures on moral government, that moral law is a unit--that it is that rule of action which is in accordance with the nature, relations and circumstances of moral beings--that whatever is in accordance with, and demanded by the nature, relations, and circumstances of moral beings, is obligatory on them. It is moral law, and no power in the universe can set it aside. Therefore, were the scriptures entirely silent on the subject of human governments, and on the subject of family government, as it actually is on a great many important subjects, this would be no objection to the lawfulness, and expediency; necessity, and duty of establishing human governments.

Obj. It is said, that human governments are founded in and sustained by force, and that this is inconsistent with the spirit of the gospel.

Ans. 1. There cannot be a difference between the spirit of the Old and New Testaments, or between the spirit of the law and the gospel, unless God has changed, and unless Christ has undertaken to make void the law, through faith, which cannot be. 'Do we make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.'

2. Just human governments, and such governments only are contended for, will not exercise force, unless it is demanded to promote the highest public good. If it be necessary to this end, it can never be wrong. Nay, it must be the duty of human governments to inflict penalties, when their infliction is demanded by the public interest.

Obj. It is said, that there should be no laws with penalties.

Ans. This is the same as to say, there should be no law at all; for that is no law which has no penalty, but only advice.

Obj. It is said, that church government is sufficient to meet the necessities of the world, without secular or state governments.

Ans. 1. What! Church governments regulate commerce, make internal improvements, and undertake to manage all the business affairs of the world!

2. Church government was never established for any such end; but simply to regulate the spiritual, in distinction from the secular concerns of men--to try offenders and inflict spiritual chastisement, and never to perplex and embarrass itself with managing the business and commercial operations of the world.

Obj. It is said, that were all the world holy, legal penalties would not be needed.

Ans. Were all men perfectly holy, the execution of penalties would not be needed; but still, if there were law, there would be penalties; and it would be both the right and the duty of magistrates to inflict them, should their execution be called for.

Obj. It is asserted, that family government is the only form of government approved of God.

Ans. This is a ridiculous assertion:

1. Because God as expressly commands obedience to magistrates as to parents.

2. He makes it as absolutely the duty of magistrates to punish crime, as of parents to punish their own disobedient children.

3. The right of family government is not founded in the arbitrary will of God, but in the necessities of human beings; so that family government would be both allowable and obligatory, had God said nothing about it.

4. So, the right of human government has not its foundation in the arbitrary will of God, but in the necessities of human beings. The larger the community the more absolute the necessity of government. If, in the small circle of the family, laws and penalties are needed, how much more in the larger communities of states and nations. Now, neither the ruler of a family, nor of any other form of human government, has a right to legislate arbitrarily, or enact, or enforce any other laws, than those that are in accordance with the nature, relations, and circumstances of human beings. Nothing can be law in heaven--nothing can be law on earth; nothing can be obligatory on moral beings, but that which is founded in the nature, relations, and circumstances of moral beings. But human beings are bound to establish family governments, state governments, national governments, and, in short, whatever government may be requisite for the universal instruction, government, virtue, and happiness of the world.

5. All the reasons, therefore, for family government, hold equally in favor of state and national governments.

6. There are vastly higher and weightier reasons for governments over states and nations, than in the small communities of families.

7. Therefore, neither family nor state governments need the express sanction of God, to render them obligatory; for both the right and duty of establishing and maintaining these governments would remain, had the Bible been entirely silent on the subject. But on this, as on many other subjects, God has spoken and declared, what is the common and universal law, plainly recognizing both the right and duty of family and human governments.

8. Christians, therefore, have something else to do, than to confound the right of government with the abuse of this right by the ungodly. Instead of destroying human governments, Christians are bound to

reform them.

9. To attempt to destroy, instead of reforming human governments, is the same in principle as is often plead by those who are attempting to destroy, rather than reform the Church. There are those, who, disgusted with the abuses of Christianity practiced in the Church, seem bent on destroying the Church altogether, as the means of saving the world. But what mad policy is this!

10. It is admitted, that selfish men need and must have the restraints of law; but that Christians should have no part in restraining them by law. But suppose the wicked should agree among themselves to have no law, and therefore should not attempt to restrain themselves nor each other by law; would it be neither the right nor the duty of Christians to attempt their restraint, through the influence of wholesome government?

11. It is strange, that selfish men should need the restraints of law, and yet that Christians have no right to meet this necessity, by supporting governments that will restrain them. What is this but admitting, that the world really needs the restraints of governments--that the highest good of the universe demands their existence; and yet, that it is wicked for Christians to seek the highest good of the world, by meeting this necessity in the establishment and support of human governments! It is right and best, that there should be law. It is necessary, that there should be. Therefore, universal benevolence demands it; but it is wicked in Christians, to have any thing to do with it! This is singular logic.

EIGHTH. The reasons why God has made no form of church or state government universally obligatory.

1. That God has no where in the Bible given directions in regard to any particular form of church or secular government, is a matter of fact.

2. That he did not consider the then existing forms, either of church or state government, as of perpetual obligation, is also certain. He did not give directions in regard to particular forms of government, either church or state:

(1.) Because no such directions could be given, without producing great revolutions and governmental opposition to Christianity. The governments of the world are, and always have been, exceedingly various in form. To attempt, therefore, to insist upon any particular form, as being universally obligatory, would be calling out great national opposition to religion.

(2.) Because, that no particular form of church or state government, either now is, or ever has been, suited to all degrees of intelligence, and states of society.

(3.) Because the forms of both church and state governments, need to be changed, with any great elevations or depressions of society, in regard to their intelligence and virtue.

NINTH. The particular forms of church and state governments, must and will depend upon the virtue and intelligence of the people.

1. Democracy is self-government, and can never be safe or useful, only so far as there is sufficient intelligence and virtue in the community to impose, by mutual consent, salutary self-restraints, and to enforce by the power of public sentiment, and by the fear and love of God, the practice of those virtues which are indispensable to the highest good of any community.

2. Republics are another and less perfect form of self-government.
3. When there are not sufficient intelligence and virtue among the people, to legislate in accordance with the highest good of the state or nation, then both democracies and republics are improper and impracticable, as forms of government.
4. When there is too little intelligence and virtue in the mass of the people, to legislate on correct principles, monarchies are better calculated to restrain vice and promote virtue.
5. In the worst states of society, despotisms, either civil or military, are the only proper and efficient forms of government.
6. When virtue and intelligence are nearly universal, democratic forms of government are well suited to promote the public good.
7. In such a state of society, democracy is greatly conducive to the diffusion of knowledge on governmental subjects.
8. Although in some respects less convenient, and more expensive, yet in a suitable state of society, a democracy is in many respects the most desirable form, either of church or state government:
 - (1.) It is conducive, as has been already said, to general intelligence.
 - (2.) Under a democracy, the people are more generally acquainted with the laws.
 - (3.) They are more interested in them.
 - (4.) This form of government creates a more general feeling of individual responsibility.
 - (5.) Governmental questions are more apt to be thoroughly discussed and understood before they are adopted.
 - (6.) As the diffusion of knowledge is favorable to individual and public virtue, democracy is highly conducive to virtue and happiness.
9. God has always providentially given to mankind those forms of government that were suited to the degrees of virtue and intelligence among them.
10. If they have been extremely ignorant and vicious, He has restrained them by the iron rod of human despotism.
11. If more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them the milder forms of limited monarchies.
12. If still more intelligent and virtuous, He has given them still more liberty, and providentially established republics for their government.
13. Whenever the general state of intelligence has permitted it, He has put them to the test of self-government and self-restraint, by establishing democracies.
14. If the world ever becomes perfectly virtuous, both church and state governments will be proportionally modified, and employed in expounding and applying the great principles of moral law, to the spiritual and

secular concerns of men.

15. The above principles are equally applicable to church and state governments. Episcopacy is well suited to a state of general ignorance among the people. Presbyterianism, or Church Republicanism, is better suited to a more advanced state of intelligence, and the prevalence of Christian principle. While Congregationalism, or Spiritual Democracy, is best suited, and only suited to a state of general intelligence, and the prevalence of Christian principle.

16. God's providence has always modified both church and state governments, so as to suit the intelligence and virtue of the people. As churches and nations rise and fall in the scale of virtue and intelligence, these various forms of government naturally and necessarily give place to each other. So that ecclesiastical and state despotism, or liberty, depends naturally, providentially, and necessarily upon the virtue and intelligence of the people. That form of government is obligatory, that is best suited to meet the necessities of the people:

(1.) This follows as a self-evident truth, from the consideration, that it is necessity alone that creates the right of human government. To meet these necessities, is the object of government; and that government is obligatory and best, which is demanded by the circumstances, intelligence, and morals of the people.

(2.) Consequently, in certain states of society, it would be a Christian's duty to pray for and sustain even a military despotism; in a certain other state of society, to pray for and sustain a monarchy; and in other states, to pray for and sustain a republic; and in a still more advanced stage of virtue and intelligence, to pray for and sustain a democracy; if indeed a democracy is the most wholesome form of self-government, which may admit a doubt.

TENTH. The true basis on which the right of human legislation rests.

Under this head, I need only to repeat the substance of what has already been said, that the right of human legislation is founded in the necessities of mankind--that the nature and ignorance of mankind lie at the foundation of this necessity--and, that their wickedness, the multiplicity and variety of their wants, are additional reasons, demanding the existence of human governments. Let it be understood, then, that the foundation of the right of human governments lies not in the arbitrary will of God; but in the nature, relations, and circumstances of human beings.

ELEVENTH. Revolutions become necessary and obligatory, when the virtue and intelligence, or the vice and ignorance of the people demand them.

1. This is a thing of course. When one form of government fails to meet any longer the necessities of the people, it is the duty of the people to revolutionize.

2. In such cases, it is in vain to oppose revolution; for in some way the benevolence of God will bring it about. Upon this principle alone, can what is generally termed the American Revolution be justified. The intelligence and virtue of our Puritan fore-fathers rendered a monarchy an unnecessary burden, and a republican form of government both appropriate and necessary. And God always allows his children as much liberty as they are prepared to enjoy.

3. The stability of our republican institutions must depend upon the progress of general intelligence and virtue. If in these respects the nation falls, if general intelligence, public and private virtue sink to that point below which self-control becomes impossible, we must fall back into monarchy, limited or absolute; or into

a civil or military despotism; just according to the national standard of intelligence and virtue. This is just as certain as that God governs the world, or that causes produce their effects.

4. Therefore, it is the maddest conceivable policy, for Christians to uproot human governments, while they ought to be engaged in sustaining them, upon the great principles of the moral law. It is certainly stark nonsense, if not abominable wickedness, to overlook, either in theory or practice, these plain, common sense, and universal truths.

TWELFTH. In what cases human legislation is valid.

1. Human legislation is valid, when called for by the necessities--that is--by the nature, relations and circumstances of the people.

2. Just that kind and degree of human legislation which are demanded by the necessities of the people are obligatory.

3. Human legislation is utterly null and void in all other cases whatever; and I may add, that divine legislation would be equally null and void--unless demanded by the nature, relations, and necessities of human beings. Consequently, human beings can never legislate in opposition to the moral law. Whatever is inconsistent with supreme love to God, and equal love to our neighbor, can by no possibility be obligatory.

4. We may yield obedience, when the thing required does not involve a violation of moral obligation.

5. We are bound to yield obedience, when legislation is in accordance with the law of nature.

6. We are bound to obey, when the thing required has no moral character in itself; upon the principle, that obedience, in this case, is a less evil than revolution or misrule. But--

7. We are bound, in all cases, to disobey, when human legislation contravenes moral law, or invades the rights of conscience.

IV. The principles upon which God deals with nations as such.

1. Each nation is regarded by God as a unit. Nations are regarded as public persons.

2. They are regarded as amenable to Him for their conduct.

3. As bound by the principle of the moral law--that is, they are bound to legislate and adjudicate in accordance with the law of nature, or that rule of conduct that requires every moral being to love God with all the heart, and his neighbor as himself.

4. His dealings with nations are only providential, and necessarily confined to this world. Nations as such, do not exist in a future world. And, of course, this must be with nations a state of retribution, instead of being a state of trial or probation.

5. As nations, He treats them according to their outward conduct. This is a thing of course. Nations as such, have no private character. Their character is public. They are regarded as public persons, and treated according to the manner in which they outwardly demean themselves towards God and his government. Upon this tenure the Jews manifestly held their worldly possessions. And God's treatment of

nations as such, in every age, has demonstrated the truth, that nations are providentially treated according to their public acts. Indeed as nations they have no other than public acts. For what individuals do is not regarded as national acts, unless these individuals are heads of government, and acting in a governmental capacity.

6. As the righteous and the wicked are mingled together in human governments, they are providentially treated alike, it being improper and impossible, when dealing with a nation as such, to make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked.

7. In eternity, God will treat rulers and ruled, according to their private characters, as they shall appear in the light of the moral law.

V. The design, propriety, and use of national fasts.

1. It is no part of the design, either of private or public fasting, to make amends for past wrongs by doing penance.

2. But they are designed as a public recognition of national responsibility to God.

3. They are designed as a public confession of national sins.

4. As a public profession of national repentance, and renunciation of them.

5. This is eminently proper in respect to national sins. For, as national sins are always public sins, they should always be as publicly confessed and renounced. This should be done by the Executive Magistrate of the nation. Indeed, there seems to be no other way to put away national sins, so as to dispense with the necessity of national judgments, but by the appointment of national fasts, national confessions, and national repentance. As national sins are not private sins, private repentance will not meet the demands of the divine government. If God does not punish nations for their sins, there must be some public reason for withholding his judgments. And as this is with nations a state of reward, God's relation to the universe demands, that He should visit national sins with national judgments, unless they are nationally renounced; that is--renounced by a national public appointment of a fast, which is the most emphatic form of making a national confession.

6. National fasts are useful, as they often avert the judgments of God. The case of Nineveh is an illustrious example of this.

7. They are a public and national rebuke of infidelity, and a public acknowledgment of the existence, government, and goodness of God.

8. They tend to arouse and quicken the public conscience.

9. They give ministers an opportunity to expose and rebuke national vices.

VI. The duty of citizens, and especially of Christians as citizens, in respect to fasts.

1. It is their duty to abstain from the ordinary business of life. Public fasts are to be publicly celebrated. Both magistrates and people are bound to lay aside their ordinary business, and attend on the solemn and public confession of their sins.

2. It is their duty to attend public worship, and unite in public confessions. And were it possible for this whole nation to assemble at Washington, and there, with the President at their head, unite in the public confession and renunciation of their sins, it would undoubtedly be their duty. On such occasions, and on this occasion, it would no doubt be eminently proper for the governors and heads of departments in the several states--for the houses of congress, to be assembled, and thus the representatives of the whole people appear before the Lord, to make public confession of the sins of the nation.

3. It is the duty of all citizens, to use whatever appropriate means are within their power, to bring about a complete national reformation.

VII. Some of the national sins which call this nation to fasting, humiliation, and prayer.

1. The outrageous injustice with which this nation has treated the aborigines of this country. The shameless wickedness of this nation, in respect to the manner in which the Indians have been duped in making treaties with them--the shocking and disgraceful manner in which these treaties have been violated by this government, is almost too bad to name. Who can mention or think of these things, without grief and indignation? How these helpless Indians have been trampled down, and in multitudes of ways oppressed and injured, until their cry has come up into the ears of Jehovah!

2. I notice the hypocrisy of this nation, in shedding British blood in defense of principles which, when applied to their own wrongs, they have always denied. As the very basis of the Revolution, they publicly declared, that "ALL MEN were born free and equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights--among which are life, LIBERTY, and the pursuit of happiness." Now, at the very time at which this declaration was made--the very men who made it--and the nation that proclaimed these truths, as an excuse for revolution and war, stood with their unsanctified feet upon the necks of the prostrate slaves! And from that day to this, this nation as such has continued, publicly and practically, when these wrongs were held up to view, to deny the principles upon which the Revolution was based; while, at the same time, she has, in view of the wrongs received from the mother country, strenuously maintained them--thus at the same time both maintaining and denying these great truths--when herself oppressed, maintaining them and fighting in defense of them--when accused of oppression, denying them, and ready to fight in support of the opposite doctrine.

3. I notice the national treatment of the question of the abolition of slavery, as another of those heinous sins for which this nation ought to blush. Is it not astonishing, that in this government the friends of the oppressed are not even allowed to petition? Our government will not so much as suffer itself to be asked to "undo the heavy burdens." "Concerning oppression they speak loftily." And could we this day meet with the public assemblies in the city of Washington, we might perhaps hear the conduct of Abolitionists, in seeking the abolition of slavery, pointed out as one of the great sins of the people, in endeavoring, as they would express it, "to dissolve the Union."

4. The great wickedness in forming, and in attempting to support a Union upon such principles. It is "a league of iniquity." The nation never had a right, in their constitution or in any other way, to recognize the lawfulness of slavery, and guarantee the protection of states in holding their fellowmen in bondage. The compact was an utter abomination. The union was a league against God. And now our public men make this excuse for supporting slavery, that by the stipulations of the constitution, they are bound to do so. Now admitting that the constitution does ever so expressly contain such stipulations, are they, can they be binding? What! can it be obligatory on the nation, or any set of men, to violate the great law of love,

because they have promised to do so. Suppose the different states had entered into a stipulation to carry on the slave trade for ever--could such a promise as this be binding on any of them? Suppose each state had promised to fit out and keep, upon the high seas, a certain number of pirate ships, to rob all the nations of the earth, to supply the public treasury with funds--could such an abominable compact be binding? Would any state have a right to abide by such a stipulation as this? No, no more than a contract to keep up a perpetual war with heaven could be binding. The fact is, that neither individuals nor nations can ever bind themselves by any promise to do wrong, to violate the law of love. Can a man render it lawful for him to murder, by promising to murder? If this be so, any sin may cease to be sin, become obligatory, and consequently a virtue, simply by promising to do it. It is lamentable and shameful, that this nation should try to preserve a union, based upon such principles as these. If the union cannot be preserved, except by abiding by a stipulation to sustain slavery, or not to interfere with it, let it be given up. It is in the highest degree rebellion against God, to attempt to support it upon such principles.

5. I call your attention to the national desecration of the Sabbath, especially by the Post Office Department. In this department of our government, our nation has literally "framed iniquity by a law," and absolutely legislated in direct opposition to the law of God. It is by no means wonderful that this department is so often crippled in its movements--that its accounts are so often embarrassed.--The curse of God is upon it. This is just what might be expected, for it is managed by a host of Sabbath breakers. If this department of government be not yet more sorely rebuked than it has been, and if the government should in general continue in its present form--if the Post Office Department continue its shameless violation of the Sabbath, I shall be disappointed if God does not mark it yet more signally with his curse.

6. Again, I notice the national love of money, which is the root and foundation of this public desecration of the Sabbath. This nation has seemed to be ready to go almost any length in obtaining wealth, and to set aside the law of God whenever it has interfered with its grasping after worldly goods.

7. I notice the notorious licentiousness and intemperance of many of our rulers. It is commonly reported, and I suppose truly, that during the sessions of Congress, the city of Washington exhibits a scene of most disgusting licentiousness and intemperance on the part of many of those who are entrusted with, and voluntarily put into places of power, and made the conservators of the public morals.

8. I notice duel-fighting and murderous deeds that are almost every year practiced in Congress. Is it too much to say that no nation is so wicked as this? Where can a nation be found, so enlightened on religious subjects as this nation, yet so recklessly, perversely, and even wantonly trampling down the government of God?

9. I notice the wickedness of political contests, and especially the great sins that were committed during the election of the late President. We are assembled to celebrate a fast appointed in view of the recent death of that President. Now who can wonder that he was taken away by a stroke of Divine Providence, in the very beginning of his official career? Who ever witnessed such disgraceful and bacchanalian scenes as very generally disgusted the eyes and grieved the hearts of the friends of virtue during that political struggle? What low, vulgar, indecent, and in many instances, profane measures were resorted to? They are too bad to name. Who does not know that "Tippecanoe" and "Hard Cider," and almost every other abomination, were the watch-words and the measures for carrying that election? My soul mourns when I say it. God forbid that I should say it to bring a railing accusation against my country. Were they not already public I would never make them so. I call your attention to them that they may be confessed among the guilt and God-dishonoring sins of this nation.

There are numerous other sins of this nation to be confessed and put away. But I have not time to call your attention to any more at present.

REMARKS.

1. As Christians, we ought to confess and lament the sectarianism and divisions of the Church, as lying at the foundation of, and as giving countenance to the strivings, slang and slander of party politics. Who can look into the religious periodicals without agony, at seeing that there is almost as much party spirit, division, censoriousness, and slander in the Church, as among party politicians. Indeed the difficulty is, the politics existing in the Church are continually keeping in countenance those political contests that are working the destruction of this nation. I say this with humiliation and trembling, because it has become so common to accuse those who would deal faithfully with the sins of the Church, of being slanderers.

2. As Christians, we ought to confess the wickedness of the Church in view of its bearing toward and treatment of those national sins of which I have spoken. What is the conduct of the Church as a body, and what is her attitude in respect to the dreadful sin of slavery. O tell not the shameful story in Gath, nor let the sound reach Askalon, that the American Church is to such a shameful extent, an apologist for slavery. And what has the Church, as such, ever done to reprove and rebuke this nation for its treatment of the Indians? Why has not her voice been heard? Why has not the Church as a body respectfully remonstrated? Why has she not at least lifted up her voice and wept in view of these abominations? And what is the conduct of the Church in respect to party politics? Why, there have always been professed Christians enough in this country to hold the balance of power. It has always been in the power of Christians to elect or defeat the election of any candidate for President who has ever been proposed. Would the Church only be in earnest in maintaining correct principles, would they be agreed in letting the world know that they would vote for no man who did not fear God, no party in that case would think of proposing a candidate of loose, or even of doubtful character. If they would be united in going always for a man of the highest moral standing, such candidates, and such only, would be proposed by the respective parties. But as it is, they have adopted the miserably wicked policy of choosing between two moral evils. Instead of choosing the best of two good men, they consent to vote for the least immoral of two bad men, thus rendering themselves responsible for the sins of this nation. It is completely within the power of the Church effectually to rebuke and put away all the sins that disgrace the nation. And how long shall the skirts of the Church be defiled with these abominations?

3. The righteous may well be expected to be included and share largely in national judgments. They really deserve it.

4. How absurd it is to say, that Christians have nothing to do with human governments. They should immediately set about the moral reformation of government. But here the question arises, how can such a reformation be brought about? I answer:

(1.) It never can be brought about by that kind of party movement--such party men and party measures as have brought this nation to such a pass of wickedness. Such party measures can never work a reformation of public morals. They are of themselves a vile and loathsome offense to public morals.

(2.) The needed reformation can never be brought about by contending for truth in a wrong spirit. There is something very remarkable in the Providence of God in this respect. Facts in the history of the world demonstrate that God would rather even truth should suffer a temporary defeat than triumph when maintained in a bad spirit. Besides there is something in the spirit which in such instances contradicts the

truth, and prevents it from being received as truth. Whenever any set of men, however much truth they may have on their side, get into a wrong spirit, in the proclamation and defense of it, they may expect that God will give them up to defeat. Men who hold the truth are very apt to be presumptuous, to take it for granted, and to boast, that they shall prevail because they have the truth. But mark me, and mark the fact when you will, that in this they will be disappointed. The truth will indeed eventually prevail, but not in their hands. God will give them over as individuals and as a party, to ultimate defeat, and in his own time, through other instrumentalities, cause his truth to prevail.

(3.) This reformation must be brought about and may be brought about by promoting union among Christians, and by extending correct views on the subject of Christian responsibility in regard to their relation to government. Any thing that will unite the Church, and consolidate her efforts, and direct them wisely on this point, will correct the national morals, and nothing else can.

5. The private views, character, or motives of the rulers in appointing a fast have nothing to do with the obligation of citizens in respect to its observance. If the ruler were an infidel, or whatever his private views or designs might be, in appointing a public fast, it is the business and duty of the people to celebrate the fast, confess and lament the real sins of the nation. If the present chief magistrate of the United States had been consulted in respect to the sins he would have the people confess, it is very probable that among them he would have mentioned the efforts of abolitionists to effect the overthrow of slavery, or as he would more probably have expressed it, the heinous crime of northern interference with the domestic institutions of the South, and an unrighteous attempt to divide the Union. Now with his private opinion on such questions the nation has nothing to do. Our business is to confess, among other enormities, the disgraceful and God-provoking sin of slavery, together with the wicked opposition of this nation to the efforts of abolitionists to bring about its overthrow.

6. Before I close this discourse, I must add a few words on the necessity of abstinence from food, as in many cases entirely indispensable to a right state of religious feeling. If the alimentary organs be continually taxed to the amount of their capability, the mind can be exercised to but a limited extent. Especially is it next to impossible, that much emotion should exist, while the digestive organs are laboriously employed in the process of alimentation. As I have before remarked, so great a determination of blood to these organs, is imperiously demanded during the process of digestion, that the mind, whose organ is the brain, must be, comparatively, and in many instances, to a great degree sluggish in its operations. Who has not learned, by his own experience, that if he is about to make a great mental effort, he must not indulge himself in a full meal immediately preceding it? Many persons, either because they are so much under the dominion of their appetite, or because they have imbibed a false notion, that to drop now and then a meal will seriously impair their health, continually and regularly load their alimentary organs to such an extent, as to render it impossible for their minds to be strongly exercised on any subject. Fasting is often useful, and sometimes indispensable, as a means of giving the mind a thorough opportunity to exercise itself, without being impeded in its action by a determination of the blood to the alimentary organs.

7. Persons in fasting should always guard against a self-righteous state of mind. Self-righteous fasting is worse than no fasting at all.

8. Fasting, either public or private, without reformation, is a great abomination to God. It is to be hoped, that our President did not intend to substitute national fasting for national reformation. But we shall see, what course they will take in regard to slavery, the treatment of the Indians, the sanctification of the

Sabbath, licentiousness, dueling, intemperance, & c., at the next session of Congress. Our rulers may expect, of course, that the people will have their eye upon them, and anxiously wait to see whether they expect to escape the judgment of God, by fasting without reformation. O, it would be dreadful, if, notwithstanding their fastings, they should persist in their sins! If they should forget that the fast was a national fast, and merely expect the reformation of individuals, without national reformation, it would be but the more offensive to God; and our fasting would but hasten our destruction.

9. Let Christians every where continue to pray, that God may reform the nation, and that our rulers may not be guilty of so gross a hypocrisy as to appoint a national fast, and then persevere in our national abominations. If they do this, it will not be surprising, if the nation should soon be called to mourn the death of another President, or that some judgment infinitely more deplorable than this, should soon desolate our country.

10. We are to be especially on our guard in contemplating the sins of this nation, certainly those of us who are, and from principle always have been opposed to those sins, lest we imbibe a censorious, angry spirit, instead of feeling a deep and real sorrow for those sins. It is of no use to scold about our national sins. Our business is to lament them, to warn, entreat, respectfully expostulate, petition Congress, and petition God, that they may be put away.

11. Let no man say, that ministers are out of their place in exposing and reproving the sins of this nation. The fact is, that ministers, and all other men, not only have a right but are bound to expose and rebuke the national sins. We are all on board the same ship. As a nation, our very existence depends upon the correct moral conduct of our rulers. And shall they deafen their ears to our petitions, expostulations, and entreaties? Shall ministers be told, shall any man be told, that he is meddling with other men's matters, when he reproves, and rebukes the abominations of slavery? As well might a man be accused of meddling with that which does not belong to him, who is on board a ship in the midst of the Atlantic ocean, because he should expostulate with and rebuke a man who should attempt to scuttle the ship.

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